United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali launches appeal for emergency drought relief for southern African nations; simultaneous appeal launched by President of Botswana, on behalf of Southern African Development Coordination Conference.

+ Secretary-General expresses concern about recent escalation of violence in Middle East; Lebanon, in letter to Secretary-General, denounces "continuing Israeli aggression" against its territory.

+ United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) takes action on further reports of "ethnic cleansing"; offers shelter to 22 Croats reportedly driven from their homes on Sunday.

+ Egyptian Foreign Minister, in letter to Secretary-General, says Egyptians are questioning the silence of United Nations on tragic events in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

+ Central Emergency Revolving Fund reaches target of $50 million; Secretary-General taking steps to activate the Fund immediately.

+ Secretary-General, on visit to Canada, tells First International Young Leaders Conference that a strong, secure sense of nationality is needed to allay fears aroused by rapid globalization and avert ethnic conflict.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, launching an Appeal for $854 million to assist 10 drought-stricken countries in southern Africa, told a meeting at Headquarters this morning: "The lives of millions of men, women and children are directly at risk. Without adequate assistance, a great mass of people in the region will rapidly face starvation and epidemics arising out of malnutrition and lack of care."

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The Appeal was also launched simultaneously by President Quett Masire of Botswana, speaking on behalf of the countries of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC).

A pledging conference will be held in Geneva on 1 and 2 June, under the joint auspices of the United Nations and the SADCC. The Secretary-General this morning called on the donor countries to sow the seeds of hope in "that drought-baked soil" of southern Africa.

Food relief has already begun arriving at African ports. Shipments of maize totalling 65,000 tonnes, channelled through the World Food Programme (WFP), arrived last week at the South African port of Durban and at Dar es Salaam in the United Republic of Tanzania. The countries targeted for assistance are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The governing body of the WFP is meeting in Rome this week to discuss key issues of world hunger and food aid. Among the major problems it is examining are its disaster relief operations in southern Africa and in the Horn of Africa.

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The Secretary-General has expressed concern about the recent escalation of violence in the Middle East in which Israelis, Palestinians and Lebanese have been killed. In a statement today, the Mr. Boutros-Ghali deplored the loss of innocent life and said he believed the continuation of hostilities could only heighten tensions in the region and might jeopardize current efforts to resolve the Arab/Isreali conflict. The Secretary-General urged all sides to exercise maximum restraint so that the momentum achieved in the peace process might be sustained.

In related development, Lebanon has denounced what it called "continuing Israeli aggression" against its territory. In a letter to the Secretary-General dated 21 May, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, Khalil Makkawi cited in particular the bombings of villages in the south. The letter called on the Security Council to urge Israel to end its policy of aggression in Lebanon. Such a policy, Mr. Makkawi said, ran counter to ongoing peace initatives and would ultimately cause that process to to fail.

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In Yugoslavia, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is taking action on further reports of "ethnic cleansing". The Spokesman for the Secretary-General said today that 22 Croats, who were driven from their homes on Sunday, had been offered shelter by UNPROFOR at its base at Klisa, where they told civilian police officers that they were reluctant to return to their homes, which they feared had already been occupied by Serbs. The group also reported a climate of terrorism characterized by acts of criminal intimidation, the Spokesman said.

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The Force was now interviewing all the adults in the group for details of the circumstances of their forced departure and UNPROFOR patrols had been introduced immediately to protect the homes of the expelled victims.

The Force had also informed the Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia of the attempted expulsion and was investigating other recent incidents of the kind. Prosecution dossiers were being prepared on the "terrorists identified as responsible for those criminal acts", the Spokesman said.

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In a related development, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, Amr Moussa, has expressed deep concern at the tragic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In a letter to the Secretary-General dated 20 May, Mr. Moussa said the inhabitants of that country were "the daily and systematic victims of violence and massacres to obliterate their identity and crush their aspirations to freedom and independence". The Foreign Minister said Egyptians had begun to ask questions about the silence of the international community and the United Nations regarding acts which it said could only be described as "genocide directed against the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina".

He urged the United Nations to intervene as a matter of urgency to ensure protection of the people, to "compel the forces of aggression to withdraw immediately" and to work for a peaceful settlement that would guarantee the sovereignty and independence of the young State.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was admitted to membership in the Nations on Friday, 22 May.

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The Central Emergency Revolving Fund has reached its target of $50 million and the Secretary-General is taking the necessary steps to make the Fund immediately operational, according to an announcement at Headquarters today.

At a press briefing following the announcement, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Eliasson, said the Fund would be "a tool which could be used quickly" by the Secretary-General to meet the most acute humanitarian needs around the world, particularly in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya, and Yugoslavia.

The Fund, which was established to help ensure a more effective response by the United Nations system to the world's disasters, received $47 million in pledges last February. The $50 million target was reached on Friday May 22, when the United States, Norway and Canada pledged the final amounts.

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The rapid globalization of the world was accompanied by growing anxiety and the proliferation of various forms of nationalism and micro-nationalism, the Secretary-General told the First International Youth Young Leaders Conference, sponsored by the Jeanne Sauvé Youth Foundation, in Montreal, Quebec, on Sunday. But, he pointed out, the "nationalism/globalization" combination, replaced perhaps by the idea of "nationalities/universality", was crucial to the future well-being of the world. That dialectic, he told the conference, was the very raison d'être of the United Nations.

In a speech greeted with a standing ovation, he defined the nation as a common "will to live", a shared "access code to the outside world" which transcended the immediate allegiances of family, clan and village, and which constituted a first step towards the universal civilization.

"In today's world, if you destroy nations, you will not have a vast universal allegiance, you will have tribes and primary ties, whether ethnic or religious, as in Somalia or in Yugoslavia; and, subsequently, you will also have super-States which exploit or dominate them. Bypassing nation-States is therefore a very uncertain course, which may even be dangerous for the future of the planet."

The upcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, he said, would "demonstrate what a well-ordered world could be, a world of nations which cooperate in order to meet the challenges posed by the very rapid globalization of modern problems."

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